



UConn to Help Students Find Housing Options

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STAMFORD - The University of Connecticut campus in downtown Stamford hopes to offer next year's freshman class something unexpected at a commuter college - a place to live.

The school has no plans to build dormitories, but it is launching a Web site that will link students and faculty with off-campus housing.

The site, which will include listings for apartment rentals and homes for sale, is expected to be running by late this month, in time to help the Class of 2012 move in before the fall semester. A message board that allows students to look for roommates is planned.

Terry Reilly, director of enrollment services and off-campus housing, said she often receives inquiries from prospective students and their parents.

"There's a lot of students that have expressed interest in coming, but they don't know where they would live," Reilly said. "We're really excited to say, 'Now we have an option for you.' "

About 60 percent of the 1,800 students enrolled live outside of Stamford and many would welcome the opportunity to cut their commutes, she said.

UConn-Stamford has seen a spike in students from Fairfield, Trumbull, Shelton and Bridgeport since it began a free train station shuttle last winter. It recently purchased an additional vehicle so it will have two shuttles running simultaneously to meet increased demand, Reilly said.

"The growing number are coming from the Bridgeport area because of the train service," she said. Because so many graduating UConn-Stamford students get jobs in the city through internships, moving is logical, Reilly said.

A consultant, Off Campus Partners of Virginia, is working with the Stamford campus and the main campus in Storrs to design the service. Trina Jones, chief operating officer of Off Campus, said demand for housing in residential neighborhoods within a mile or two

of college campuses is growing nationwide. They call the students who live in those neighborhoods "resimuters" - part resident, part commuter.

Nutritional science major Lori Fuchs, 18, said she would have looked into renting an apartment in Stamford with friends to cut her 1-hour, 20-minute commute if she weren't transferring to Storrs next semester.

"I love it here, but I feel like I'm missing out on the real college experience," said Fuchs, who lives with her parents in Bridgeport and commutes by train.

Even students from Stamford, such as Rob Yoshikami, 20, who lives a five-minute walk away on Whittaker Place, said they'd consider renting to have independence.

Living off-campus is their only option, because UConn has no plans to build dorms in Stamford or any of the four other undergraduate satellite campuses.

Stamford Board of Realtors President Phil Caruso said the high rents in downtown Stamford will be the biggest obstacle for students. Now, the least expensive downtown one-bedroom unit, at 400 square feet, is listed for \$995 a month, he said.

"I think the rents are probably just too high for what they are looking for," Caruso said. "Twelve-hundred dollars is almost like our base starting price for a one-bedroom."

The best option for students would be to find a two-bedroom apartment to share for \$700 or \$800 each per month, he said.

An online survey last semester found UConn-Stamford students were willing to spend up to \$600 a month to live near campus with a roommate, said Elly Koskorelos, an officer in the student government. Some said they'd have to live within walking distance because they'd give up their cars to afford the rent, she said.

Jones said today's college students are not always subsisting on Ramen noodles and pizza.

"There is price sensitivity, though not as much as one might think. College students spend over \$60 billion on rent annually," she said. "A lot of the time their parents will pay, so you don't have a lot of defaults."

Her company has worked with colleges in pricey urban markets before, such as American University and George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Parents who have two children in college at the same time, or back-to-back, sometimes consider buying, Jones said.

Some UConn-Stamford parents have looked at the Trump Parc building under construction across from the Broad Street campus, but haven't come up with the cash for a unit in the luxury high-rise. Prices start at \$670,000 in the building, expected to be Stamford's tallest and one of the ritziest when complete.

"We've had several parents in to buy their kids condos, but they haven't pulled the trigger yet," said Jessica Rohm, managing director of sales and marketing. "It's always the father and the daughter - it's never a mother and a son. Daddy's little princess needs a doorman."

But not every UConn-Stamford student has the money, or the desire, to live closer to campus.

Finance major Ali Chaudry, 21, said he's happy living with his parents in Milford.

"In fact, they give me money, so it's pretty good," he said.

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